

A Soldier Unafraid

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A SOLDIER UNAFRAID

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ANDRÉ CORNET-AUQUIER

A SOLDIER UNAFRAID

LETTERS FROM THE TRENCHES
ON THE ALSATIAN FRONT

BY
CAPTAIN ANDRÉ CORNET-AUQUIER
OF THE 133D REGIMENT OF INFANTRY

EDITED AND TRANSLATED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION

By THEODORE STANTON, M.A.



BOSTON
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*This translation is dedicated to the
Young Officers of our National Army
now hastening to France to aid in
the Great Contest in which Captain
Cornet-Auquier fell. May this
youthful French hero be their model
and their inspiration both in life
and, if needs be, in death, T. S.*

Show me the way to make a gallant fight;
Help me to love whate'er is just and right,
To face whate'er shall come without a sigh!
And when the Last Great Rest shall come to me,
Guide me, O Starlight, to Eternity.

ELIZABETH STORY GLEASON.

PREFACE

AT an early age André Cornet-Auquier, author of the letters which follow, was noticeable for his expansive and affectionate nature, for his studiousness and a deep respect for his teachers and superiors. At school, he was never punished, and for nine successive years at college received the annual prize for excellence in studies. Yet he was neither a "grind" nor a "goody-goody." He was ardently attached to his family and was never so happy as when at home. But he knew the world and its ways. "As a young man", his father writes, "one of his favorite pleasures was to stretch himself out at full length at his mother's feet, put his head in her lap, as he used to do when a child, and thus participate in the conversation of the family circle." One of his college professors says of him: "His soul gave quick response to everything that was right and he was interested in all the grand problems which agitate modern

society.” Though pious, he never paraded his piety or intruded it, but revealed it by his acts rather than by words. He prayed in the trenches, in his dugout bed, even on horseback; and when suffering at the front from insomnia, he tells us he would sometimes pray himself to sleep. “He held”, his father writes me, “that prayer is a permanent state of the soul, rather than a momentary act.” In a word, in religion, Captain Cornet-Auquier was a broad-minded “muscular Christian.”

His physical life was as clean as was his intellectual and spiritual existence. He detested obscene stories and everything of a *double-entendre* nature, and at twenty-eight could say of himself: “If I am killed, I shall hand back my body to God as pure as I received it from him at my birth.” The Reverend Mr. Gambier, who officiated at his burial, said of him: “He did not admit that there were two systems of morals, — one for men and another for women”; and one of his professors wrote to the bereaved parents: “We will never again find at the college the like of that boy for the moral influence which he exerted on his classmates.”

But he was an enthusiast not only of moral beauty and purity; he loved also artistic and natural beauty. "He was passionately fond of poetry, music and song", his father says, and in more than one passage of the following letters this fact comes out. "The grand works of God, — the sea, lofty mountains, lakes and sunsets ravished him to the point of ecstasy." If he had not been an ardent Christian, he would surely have become a pronounced pantheist. The letters abound in evidences of this.

The French Protestants, like the Jews in general, are very international, one of the happy consequences — perhaps the only one — of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. This internationalism, which, however, does not preclude fervent patriotism — some of these letters contain the most glowing tributes to country I have ever read — is very marked in the case of the Cornet-Auquier family. In the United States they have cousins, one of these being Irene Charlesworth, well known in Tennessee as a sculptress, while the young captain, who was professor at Glasgow University, mentions several times in the following pages "those dear British uncles."

One of his sisters married in England during the present war and the first letter in the series is dated from Wales.

Perhaps the most significant testimony to this young man's worth are the letters which the family received after his death, from the non-commissioned officers and common soldiers of his company. A sergeant writes: "It is not a spectacle often witnessed, — that of soldiers, accustomed to face death, weeping like children as they stood round his bier." This is from a corporal: "We esteemed him and loved him as though we were his sons." "We often speak of him," says the company's cook, "but always try to check ourselves because such a loss makes us sad."

The following letters, selected from a collection of some four hundred, will take a high place, I think, in the wonderful epistolary contribution, on the part of the French, to the literature of this war. I say intentionally, on the part of the French, for the home correspondence of the soldier boys of France will, it seems to me, be given first rank in this department of contemporary writing. There are at least three good reasons why this should be so.

In the first place, the excellent instruction in composition given in the French schools, which has often been remarked upon by foreign educators, has taught the average French boy how to write, and the élite of the youth is past master in the art.

In the second place, the system of universal military training which has prevailed in France for the past half century has put into the army all the intellectual part, along with the ordinary mass, of the population. This was true in the very first hours of the present war and it has been so ever since. None of the Allies can have lost so many young poets, prose writers, musicians, artists, professors and school teachers, as has France. The intellectual holocaust has been simply appalling.

In the third place, before the beginning of the second month of the war, the enemy was on French territory, and the young men of France saw and felt that it was they alone who stood between a ruthless foe and their own homes and families. "You and sister may sleep quietly to-night, for I shall be on guard in the trenches", writes one of these superb youths to his mother; "I shall watch

over you, and you know who will watch over me." It should be remembered in this connection, that since September, 1914, to this very day, Paris has been as near the lines of the enemy — and what an enemy! — as New York would be if the most formidable army the world has ever seen were at Poughkeepsie. It is easy to imagine what effect such propinquity has had on the tone of the home letters of the French soldiers at the front.

I have been personally interested in three different collections of these French military letters and instrumental in bringing them before the American public in English dress.

"A Soldier of France to his Mother"¹ presents the correspondence of a gifted young pantheist and brings out that peculiarly strong attachment between mother and son often so striking in France. "The Undying Spirit of France"² shows how the innate gallant soul of the country, running through the letters which M. Maurice Barrès and I give in this little volume, is simply the revival

¹ Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, \$1.00.

² New Haven: Yale University Press, \$0.80.

of the gallant soul of old which has characterized France since the far-off days of its birth as a nation. And now this new collection is typical of two or three admirable qualities of the French. We see here again that strong attachment of mother for son and son for mother, that splendid readiness to die for France, and that firmness in the faith of the French Protestant of to-day, a trait inherited from those "Puritans of France", the stout-hearted Huguenots.

During the past two years and a half scores of volumes of these soldiers' letters have issued from the French presses. M. Maurice Barrès has made them his special contribution to the literature of the war and I myself have examined more or less cursorily a dozen or more of these books. Some surprise, I learn, has been occasioned in the minds of those of a skeptical turn of thought at the apparently inexhaustible stock of these letters, and it is sometimes asked whence come all these epistles *d'outre tombe*? M. Barrès, himself, answers this question when in one of his books he speaks of "the millions of sublime letters, which for the past two years have furnished France

her spiritual food, — these innumerable letters, perhaps a million a day.”

Other readers of these letters may ask whether all the soldiers of France write like those presented in the three volumes mentioned above. Without giving a direct answer to this question, I may say that everybody who is in close touch with the noble France of to-day has had experiences similar to those of M. Barrès.

During the first fourteen months of this war I served as an orderly in a large military hospital near Paris, where we had some six hundred wounded. My duties were to write letters for those young Frenchmen who were incapacitated in any way from writing for themselves, and I can say that I often helped to put on paper just such thoughts as those found in the letters revealed in this and other volumes, while during my present sojourn in the United States, I have received from French soldiers, directly or indirectly, letters of this same tenor. *Ab uno disce omnes.*

THEODORE STANTON.

NEW YORK, March, 1918.

A SOLDIER UNAFRAID

LETTERS FROM THE TRENCHES ON THE ALSATIAN FRONT

Colwyn Bay, North Wales, August 3, 1914.

Dearest Parents: The latest news shows that we are in for war. I learned this yesterday afternoon. When we heard it in the house where I was staying, everybody grew pale. We thereupon had family prayers and sang, "Be with us, Lord." How beautiful are the words of that hymn. Our host prayed for me and for mama, expressing the hope that she might have God's support in her trial. "We recommend to Thee the mother of our brother," were his words; "Thou knowest what they are to one another." I was and am still calm. God is there; fear nothing. And you know I have a military soul. Tell the British uncles that I am proud to fight not only for France but also for England, that dear

second native land of mine; and if I must die for those two countries, I shall do so happily, provided only that we are victorious. But I am a French soldier all the same. I shall reach Paris to-morrow, during the day.

Châlon-sur-Saône, August 5.

Tell the English uncles that I shall fight like a Frenchman and die like an Englishman. The order will be Nelson's famous one: "England expects that every man will do his duty!" So let us be of good courage. Hurrah for France and England!

Belley, August 6.

You cannot imagine the delirious enthusiasm of the troops. A British officer whom I met at the Ambérieu station can't get over his surprise at it. I am back again in the military spirit, — a soldier to my fingers' tips.

Belley, August 15.

I shall soon be orderly officer, charged with the police of our barracks. Then you may be sure it will go hard with the saloons.

We have full power over them, and they will find it out, these miserable wretches who inveigle the soldiers in by the back door and get them drunk. Many of us are burning to get to the front. I came here to fight, am full of ardor and ready to do all I can. But here we are hanging about doing nothing, boring ourselves, while others are getting shot down. So the first call for volunteers will find me en route for the firing-line.

Approaching Alsace, August 23.

Dear Mother and Father: I am off to the war. I have made the first fifteen miles all right. The colonel has received me very kindly and I have met many of the soldiers whom I had under me when I was in the service. I am separated from my friend Girard, but as he is in a neighboring battalion we shall often see one another. It seems odd to hear German spoken around you. But you feel, nevertheless, very plainly that you are in France. At Belfort, I saw twenty-four cannon which had been taken from the enemy and met several batches of German prisoners. It seemed queer to see them laughing and joking when we passed

them on the road. They consider us "comrades", the football match being at an end, at least as far as they are concerned. The captain whom I had at Belley cried like a child because he couldn't come with us.

Alsace, August 25.

What a reception we have had! "You are our saviors," the people said to us this morning. They drink to our health with a "Hurrah for French Alsace!" They are taking good care of us, in fact are really coddling us. But they aren't doing too much for us, for this is hard work we are at. On account of the flying machines, we have to do everything at night. During the past five days I have not slept more than from twelve to fifteen hours; so we are all tired out, though we have plenty to eat. My German is very useful, but the people here are very proud to speak French. The morale is good.

August 27.

The popular sentiment varies in different places. Sometimes we find the inhabitants less French in one spot than in another.

September 4.

I have been under fire for the first time! Oh, the horrors of war! The ravaged villages! How it all tries your nerves! God be with us! I feel that He is with me!

September 10.

I am writing you a few hundred yards from the enemy's lines. I have been lying only two hundred yards from the Germans and I can assure you I kept my eyes open. We are all beat out. It is ten days since I have had a wash, and I haven't had my shoes off for a week. I couldn't give you an idea of my complexion if I tried. It was the heavy artillery which gave me my first baptism of fire. For three hours we lay flat on the ground while the shells fell all around us. One of them burst scarcely more than five or six yards from me, making a great hole in the ground and covering me with earth and debris. But the worst thing about all this is the smell of the dead bodies. The other day my section was detailed to bury some thirty half-putrefied corpses. You cannot imagine what this work is. Oh what horrors I have witnessed, — terrible

wounds and ruined villages. What brutes these Germans are to burn the farms. I am quite ready to give my life if I know that you will make the sacrifice of it for France. I feel that I am surrounded with prayers, and I often pray for you all. One of my best comrades here is a priest who is also a second lieutenant like myself. A thousand affectionate remembrances to all. God preserve us all as He has done so far. Your son and brother who sends warmest love.

September 12.

Here is a piece of news for you. I have been put in command of a company. I of course keep my old rank, but I have all the powers, rights, and also all the responsibilities of a captain. It's terrible. When I was told this yesterday, it really made me sick, thinking of the lives of all these men in my hands. Pray for me often. I need your prayers now more than ever. I feel so young and inexperienced. You have no idea of the horrors of a battle field. You cannot imagine it. This morning we went through a village where only a single house and the

church had not been burnt. All the rest had been given over to the flames, nothing but the four walls standing. You should hear the inhabitants tell of the suffering they have gone through and see the houses where these German brutes have passed. The cannon are thundering, and we are continuing the pursuit of their fleeing army. On the ridge which I am holding they have abandoned a considerable quantity of artillery ammunition. Have you any news of the Londoners and of Marguerite?¹ I get nothing from you or England. I have had only a post card since I left Belley.

September 22-24 and 27.

I have been two weeks without taking off my shoes, washing or shaving. I am writing you under shell fire, and I eat and sleep in the same conditions. It is terrible the state of mind you get into on a battle field. I would never have believed that I could remain so indifferent in the presence of dead bodies. For us soldiers, human life seems to count for nothing. To think that one can laugh, like a crazy man, in the

¹ His sister, who was a military nurse.

midst of it all. But as soon as you begin to reflect an extraordinary feeling takes possession of you, — an infinite gravity and melancholy. You live from day to day without thinking of the morrow, for you ask yourself, may there be a morrow? You never use the future tense without adding, *If we get there.* You form no projects for the time to come. Everything for the moment is at a standstill. What a strange life. You almost think you would prefer to know what is coming. And to think that God knows and that He had foreseen it all! A captain who is a friend of mine and who is a very pious Catholic, said to me the other day that before every battle he prays. Our major answered that it was not the moment for such things and that he would do better to attend to his military duties. The captain replied: “Major, that doesn’t prevent me from commanding, taking orders, and fighting. On the contrary, it braces me up.” I said: “Captain, I do just as you do, and I too find that it does me good.” My dear little mother writes me that she would so like to press my weary head to her heart. And I too; for sometimes I am all

done up, especially since I have had this company to command. To-day is Sunday, ten A.M. You are going downstairs to prayers, and papa will pray for "our soldiers and sailors." Oh pray earnestly for them. How painful it is to hear the cannon roar on Sunday, instead of listening to songs of praise and prayers. I embrace you all most tenderly, my dear ones.

September 28.

It seems that the longer this war lasts, more the chance of escaping diminishes. But have confidence in our Heavenly Father. Nothing happens without His volition. It was predicted that this war would be either very short or very long.

October 4.

To-day for the first time since the war began, I have been able to take what resembles a bath and really get clean. I have a wonderful major, who knows his profession and in whom I have perfect confidence, which is an important thing. He pushes me ahead and says that he is going to make me a leader.

October 9.

I learned yesterday by the newspapers, of the death of Captain Valentin. It is heart-rending. Poor Gambier. Such a charming fellow. And why all this? Oh, this cursed war. Poor Bolle. His right arm gone. But at least he escaped with his life. Yesterday, as we were back of the firing-line having our periodic rest, I took advantage of this and invited to lunch the commander of our battalion and a captain whom I like very much. We gave them a fine meal. Here is the menu: Entrée: sausage and ham, preceded by a delicious soup; a round of beef with a famous sauce, canned peas, which were most palatable; a roast with fried potatoes — I only wish I could send you some — browned to a golden yellow; salad, apple fritters, a tart, cakes, pears; wine: Bordeaux white Graves; coffee and char-treuse! The major nearly fell off of his chair at the sight of all this and of course we were highly complimented. And all this was done by *my* cook, a miner from Saint-Étienne, aided for the occasion by my landlady. In addition, we had a large white tablecloth,

plates changed every second course, etc., etc. We didn't know ourselves with all these frills. It is odd how here at the front, for weeks at a time, we eat like pigs, and on the whole badly, when we suddenly start gormandizing and are idiotic. For instance, yesterday's lunch was simply an idiotic thing to do. But then you will admit that we might have done something worse. And now that I have got a bed, I can't get to sleep in it. How can you expect me to sleep undressed in a bed when I have got in the habit of sleeping with my boots on, with a revolver at my side, on straw? I have a letter from brave uncle Charles. You might think it written by a strategist. The brave old uncle is just dying from a desire to fight at my side. He writes that if he could do so, his only prayer would be not to die before he had killed, he himself, "at least three Boches!"

October 17.

Here is a true story that Papa might like to send to *Le Progrès*. For the past ten days we have been holding the little village of Gemainfaing, which the Germans bombard generously for several hours every day,

without ever having wounded a single man in our battalion. One fine day, however, when the bombardment was worse than usual, they finally succeeded in wounding somebody, but he was a German! Here is how it happened. A shell fell on the house occupied by the commander of our battalion, broke through the roof into the haymow and burst there. None of the soldiers was hurt, but they were not a little surprised to suddenly see fall down from above among them a poor devil of a Boche who, since the enemy had left the place, had hidden himself in the hay, where he was nearly dead with hunger. The unlucky fellow, a reservist with nine children, was thus driven from his hiding-place by a German shell and was, in addition, wounded in the arm. Rolling down from the loft like Cyrano from the moon, he landed in spite of himself in the midst of a group of French troopers! He begged them not to kill him, whereupon they took him to the major, who gave him a cordial and sent him to the doctor. This is one of our best stories. But there are others which happen every now and then to enliven our existence.

If it were only that I wish to see you all, I would not complain at being disappointed in this respect. But what grates on my nerves is this separation which threatens to last indefinitely. Then I sometimes find myself asking myself the question, Shall we meet again? To be left in doubt on this point is excruciating; and yet it is better that it be so. But if it were only possible for God to reply to our prayers and let us see that His will agreed with our dearest wishes, what a comfort that would be. Nor have we forgotten to pray for all those who have fallen. But God's will be done!

October 23 and 25.

The other day I crept up close to the enemy's trenches and got so near that I could hear the Germans speaking to one another. It made quite an impression on me. I ought to tell you that while I am writing you I am drinking tea made as they make it in England. Of course it is not so good as the tea of dear Aunt Clara, but nevertheless it brings back to me memories of good old England. We receive regularly the "Petits Paquets du Soldat." They are

very fine. They contain a lot of warm things, — a flannel shirt, a flannel girdle, a pair of drawers, two pairs of socks, two handkerchiefs, a towel, tobacco, and lead pencils or writing paper. You can see that it is the mamas who make them up. Here is the label on each package: "For one of our brave soldiers of the 133d infantry:" and inside is a pleasant little message on a card: "We hope you are in good health and that you are of good cheer. Hurrah for France!" This brought tears to my eyes. Some of these packages are sent by religious organizations and others by private individuals.

It is very odd the moral and nervous effect which war produces on me. I have seen decaying bodies, some with their eyes open and looking as if they were gazing at me. I have seen the worst sort of wounds, — legs cut off by bursting shells and bathed in a sea of blood. Sometimes I have had to jump over bodies in moving about. But all this no longer has any effect on me. Yet a moving story, patriotic words, a brave act, a sign of pity, — such things make my hair stand on end and bring tears into my eyes.

To-night I am on duty in the trenches. We have a beautiful moonlight sky. Oh, how much good it will do me to pray for you there. Good-by, dear ones. I send best love to you all and commend you to God.

Your affectionate son and brother,
 André.

October 26.

I wish you would please send me a New Testament with the Psalms; as small an edition as possible. All the German soldiers have prayer books; there are Protestant and Catholic ones. They contain morning and evening prayers, where divine protection is asked against the "bose Feind!"¹ For them, I am the "bose Feind."

October 28.

Dear Ones: I have just been promoted lieutenant! You will recall how I felt when I was given the stripes of high private. This new distinction scarcely moves me so much as that did. You get blasé even in military honors! The fact is that in the

¹ The wicked enemy.

midst of what we are going through, you haven't time to think about a stripe more or less. But I think you will find some pleasure in reading the enclosed dispatch. I learned of my advancement from a telephonic message sent me by the colonel, which came at eight in the evening when I was already rolled up in my blanket, sleeping. One of my second lieutenants woke me up and handed me the yellow paper which we all know so well. I was all tired out and began to grumble to myself: "Well, I suppose this is another marching order; and I am so sleepy." But holding out the sheet, the young officer continued: "My best congratulations, lieutenant." And then I read these lines: "Lieutenant-Colonel Dayet, commanding the 133d regiment, sends his best congratulations to Mr. Cornet-Auquier, promoted lieutenant." Our major and a captain that I like very much had added these lines underneath: "We send ours, too." Wasn't all this very nice? Colonel Dayet is a fine officer and a real leader in whom we have the greatest confidence. He is always calm, reserved and very brave. He knows how to handle the

common soldier and how to speak with his men. During a recent fight I saw him pat a soldier's cheek as he said: "You look a little pale, my boy, but I am sure you're not afraid."

November 4.

I have had an excellent friend since I have been in command of the company. When I arrived he was a reserve adjutant but he is now a second lieutenant. In civil life his calling is that of a teacher in the public schools. He is very nice looking, is polite and reliable, was recently married and is very much attached to his wife. He speaks of me in all his letters to her, and she is very thankful for the little kindnesses which I am able to show him. So we have become quite confidential.

November 14.

Here is another good story for *Le Progrès*. It happened in the 23d regiment not far from here. At some points our trenches are only eighty-five yards or so from those of the Boches. Now it is possible that in these woods on dark nights you may easily

lose your way; and this is what actually happened to one of our men recently. Hearing somebody snoring in a trench, he entered it, settled himself down comfortably, and fell off to sleep. Finding the man next to him too close, he pushed him away. But the other, in his sleep, carelessly threw his leg over him, whereupon, our impatient Frenchman tossed it off vigorously and by this time being quite waked up, suddenly perceived that his bedfellow was a German! You can imagine how quickly he made tracks from that trench.

November 15.

Yesterday we received some reënforcements from Belley and among them were ten officers, several of whom were captains. So all our companies are now commanded by captains, except the first, which I still command, both the colonel and the major wishing me to continue in the post. Of course I thoroughly appreciate this honor, though I am not so pleased with it now as I would be if we were in time of peace, for the circumstances attending it are tinged with sadness; I feel that I owe the promotion to

the fact that comrades have fallen in battle; and my joy, quiet and melancholy to a degree, is that of a man who is doing his best and leaving the rest to God.

How sad I am at times in my solitude and how I long to see you all again, — sad that my life should thus be ever in suspense and because of your inquietude and anxieties. I think little of myself but oh, so much of you all. There are moments when I wish I had no family, that I were alone in the world, for I feel that I would then be less apprehensive. What would I then care for death whom we meet face to face every day, never knowing in the morning whether we will go to bed in the evening? Then come moments when my confidence returns, and I repeat the phrase which Marguerite sent me on a scrap of paper as I passed through Paris, — “nothing will happen to thee unless God wills it.” So all will go well because His wish will be done. He will provide.

At the front it is very difficult to pray well, you have so little time to yourself, and you are interrupted at every instant. It has happened to me, dead with sleep, to drop

off into a slumber while praying, and when I wake up later in the night, I go right on praying in order to put me to sleep again. But God understands that, doesn't He? And anyway, prayer seems to me to be a constant state. God knows that if I do not pray to Him with my lips, I do so with my heart every day. He knows my dearest wishes, my most ardent prayers, and He knows that, even when not expressed in words, they mount ever from my heart towards Him, and that it is only because I believe in Him that I dare express these prayers and these wishes. An easier thing for me to do is to read my New Testament. The little one that Yvonne and Thérèse sent me I am never separated from. This morning I lingered over this verse: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."¹ That sufficed me. With Jesus and by Him, you feel so well shielded.

When you receive this letter, I shall be, *deo volente*, resting a little back of the firing-

line. Would the journey be too long and too hard for papa to come there? Think of seeing him and embracing him a few miles from the Boches! The rendezvous would be at Saint-Dié.

November 21.

I have just been passing two days with my company in a little village where I was chief in command. I represented the military authority and even the mayor took his orders from me. The villagers had to come to me for their permits for circulation. In a word, I was a personage. I am admirably lodged with some very nice people, where is a gentle nineteen-year-old girl named Thérèse. How I make them both laugh, — her and her mother. It does one good to enjoy women's society again and get a little coddling. In the life we are leading, to be with ladies and a young girl for two days is something as if the peace were signed, or at least like an armistice. You can speak of your own mama and sisters with those who understand you. I was a boy again, young once more.

I returned here to-day with my company;

and when from my horse I looked back on these two hundred and seventy fine fellows winding along the road, I had a feeling of pride which seemed new to me. By the way, you know I don't look bad on my big horse, all finely equipped, saber at my side and my blanket in a roll behind the saddle. Every now and then I find myself saying: "If they only could see me, how pleased they would be!" The "they" is you; and I see each one of you in my mind's eye, one after the other, and I seem to hear your reflections. There is papa with his eyes glistening, somewhat moved and at bottom very proud of his son. Isn't that so, dear old daddie? Then there is mama, who timidly urges me to be careful "with that horse." The poor old nag is really a prisoner, a German mare. I don't know what to call her, so the men have named her "Boche", though I prefer "Daisy."

I have always forgotten to thank good Lucie¹ for her preserves, which we have already disposed of in part. Many, many thanks, dear old soul.

¹ The family cook.

November 26. Telegram.

You may risk the trip. Let the rendezvous be at Weick's bookshop, at Saint-Dié.¹

December 3.

I am keeping up well, but I would like so much to have you here still. I enjoyed so much your little stay and the officers did too. They were in fact quite moved when they said good-by to you. Fine big old Defert said to Farjat: "I hurried off for I felt that I was losing control of myself." Don't you recall how he hastily shook hands and ran off?

God is good and I confide you to His care.

¹ On November 30th, M. and Mme. Cornet-Auquier started to see their son. "We reached Saint-Dié after a fatiguing journey of twenty-four hours," the father writes me. "Our joy is more easy to imagine than to describe when, at a distance, we saw on the sidewalk, in front of the bookshop, the fine figure of our dear boy. He took us to the village of La Voivre, where his battalion was billeted, and where we spent two delightful days with him, taking our meals at the officers' mess. He left us on December 3rd, an hour before we too left the village. We prayed together before separating. Of course we were all deeply moved at the moment of our departure. His last words were: 'I feel that God is with me and that so far He has turned bullets away from me.' The same evening he wrote us a letter."

December 5.

How often I have thought of you since you left La Voivre and how I hope your return trip passed off pleasantly. I am afraid, however, that the night must have been cold and I do hope mama is none the worse for the journey. The cyclist brought back the cape that Jacquier lent mama. You did indeed lead for a moment a military existence, for mama was partly dressed as an officer! I can easily imagine your homecoming and guess what the conversation was like. What a lot of questions you must have been asked! But this was quite unnecessary, for you yourselves must have been only too eager to tell all you had seen and heard.

December 9.

We have offered a cross ¹ to our dear major. The little ceremony was private and was very touching. Jacquier sang, and I recited "Après la Bataille," ² presented in the form of a parody arranged by me. I don't think I ever saw the major so much

¹ Probably the decoration of the Legion of Honor.

² From "La Légende des Siècles," by Victor Hugo.

amused. "Well, there's a lot of talent in your first company," he remarked.

December 24.

We are still in the mountains and among the pine trees. We haven't many comforts here, but we are not hard to please; and then we look on the bright side of things and get some fun out of all that comes our way. When we are crouching down in our awful little hole, Farjat and I repeat twenty times a day a phrase that always sets us off laughing, — "If our families were only to look in and see us!" But one can get extraordinarily hardened to anything. Why, sometimes with only our trousers and shirts on we take a wash in a brook, — when we have time for it.

To think that to-morrow is Christmas! I mistrust the Boches, and I am expecting a pretended attack. This was their way in 1870. Yes, peace on earth, but when the Teutons are destroyed. God bless you and guard you. Our communion in Him unites us and brings us closer together.

December 26.

Christmas has come and gone. The day did not differ from all those which we have passed since we came here. Farjat and I both tried very hard to properly celebrate Christmas Eve, but I was afraid our neighbors over the way might play us some nasty trick and in the guise of a "Minuit Chrétien",¹ the wretches might, in order to please the "Old German God", send us a good shower of grape. So I made a round of the trenches and saw to it that the men were on the lookout, with their eyes and ears on the stretch and their guns in the embrasures. But is that the way to celebrate the Night of Bethlehem?

The Boches on their side were in the same state of mind in regard to our intentions, and during the whole night their patrols were on the move around our outposts. The result was that throughout the whole of Christmas Eve an uninterrupted fusillade was kept up. But notwithstanding all this there were some signs of a celebration. In fact we had talked so much about it that we

¹ A Catholic Christmas hymn.

finally got to believe that there was one; and then you felt more alone than usual, you were sadder, further from family and friends, penetrated with a deeper longing for home and peace, more in communion with the dear absent ones. I read the second chapter of St. Luke and you doubtless did the same thing at church. Then there were the letters, of which I got a lot. And finally we had a supply of candies and cakes sent us by the ladies of Belley and Bourg.

But it suddenly occurs to me that New Year's Day is near and that wishes are in order. Wishes! You know what they are. Yours and mine must be very much alike and the same ever since the war broke out. We have expressed them in our secret prayers. May God grant them. For me, I ask Him to give me only the courage to submit to His will, and if He permits me to be killed in battle, I ask of Him but one thing, — to die victorious at the head of my splendid and dear company.

January 1 and 2, 1915.

How I would like to feel that you are ready, even before it comes, to make if necessary

the sacrifice of my life. How I would like to be able to say to myself: "At least they are ready, and if my death would be painful to them, they are resigned to it, resigned in advance." I also have moments of impatience, especially when I feel myself so full of youth and strength, when I reflect on all that I have abandoned, of work, hopes, all that future which was smiling on me, — at such moments I wish it were all ended. But this morning I began reflecting on what is the life of an individual in comparison with the general peace of all the nations of Europe, — nothing. We all know, those of us on the firing-line, that to-morrow or the day after, we too will probably follow the others. Well, so let it be if God wills it. He who holds in His hands our destinies knew that this or that event would happen. If I die, it is because that is His wish, and if that is His wish, it is well and there is nothing to complain about. I can live and die only through His will. So have confidence and be calm. I ask Him every day to detach me more and more from the things of this world. Oh, I know it is very hard, very difficult. There is the flesh which

rebels at the thought of death. But we must remember that others have died who were beloved of their parents, their wives and their children. My dear little mother, you say you think me admirable. Why? Think how fortunate I have been so far. Think how much more others have suffered when compared with me. My hour has perhaps not yet sounded. It will probably come. My only prayer is that it will find me ready. I no longer pray for myself, but for the others, for you all, and for thee, mother, especially; and how ardent, fervent, passionate is that prayer. I ask God to make you all calm and brave whatever happens. I would be a hundredfold stronger if I knew that you were *joyously ready*. And especially do not look upon me as a hero or a wonder. No. What have I done that is extraordinary? Nothing. I have tried to do my duty like everybody else. That's all.

How sad it made me to hear of the death of Captain Braun. There is a death much sadder than mine would be. We are very fortunate, for I have neither wife nor children like those other two friends of ours. And then we are sure to meet again if it

should please God to separate us momentarily. In fact, as I was just saying to Major Barberot, who left me a moment ago, what are our lives worth when we think of the years of happiness and of peace of those who will follow us and those who may survive us. We labor for to-morrow, in order that there may be no more wars, no more spilling of blood, no more killing, no more wounded, no more mutilated victims; we labor, we whom our mothers will so weep for, in order that other mamas may never know these bitter tears. In truth, when one thinks of the centuries that this peace will last, one is ashamed of the rebellious movements which the flesh is guilty of at certain moments at the thought of death. If I must die, I ask but one grace, and that is to die at the head of my company, without my knowing it, from a bullet in my heart. Oh, above all things, may I receive no ball in the abdomen which might cause me to writhe in pain and die little by little.¹ When you hear those wicked flies whistle, you ask yourself: "Will I pass between them? If

¹ And yet this is the very way in which Captain Cornet-Auquier did die. See p. 109.

not, where am I going to be hit?" If we escape alive from this war, how agreeable it will be to be able to walk along the highways without having to utilize the banks or the ditches in order to hide oneself!

I have received your letters. Mama's gives me special pleasure because she says that if she saw me charging the enemy, she would cheer me on. That is the sort of language I like to hear, and I am braver than ever since I have read those words. There's a true French mother!

January 14.

Awfully bad weather and heaps of mud, which doesn't make our work the easier. But we don't let such things depress us, and good spirits are the rule. I have already told you that I mess now with Major Barberot and I assure you that fun is the order of the day. The major and I are the life and soul of the party. In addition, my friend Captain Cornier, who is my fellow lodger, is a great punster, whose puns seem to flow as naturally as water. He is a very fine fellow, rather reserved and very conscientious, from whom I learn a great deal.

January 15 and 17.

Lots of snow last night, but what a fine night it was. The magnificent pines of this region, loaded down with snow, presented a really fairy-like appearance. The underbrush is also beautiful. I have made ten photographs of it all.

Those of us who escape safe and sound from this war will be sturdy fellows. Can you imagine anybody getting so that he can dress out of doors in such weather as this we are now having, live in mud, cold and snow, with feet never dry, and yet not even sneeze? What a superb physical training. We are simply overflowing with life and health. How we fall to when mealtime comes. What a cure for neurasthenia. How good it is to live. And yet to think that at any moment you may be killed outright by a wretched little bullet! What a fine existence and yet what an existence!

The den in which I live with my friend Captain Cornier is a big subterranean room, with a rather low ceiling, the entrance door being especially low. In one corner is a little Godin stove, which burns wood, not

scarce in these parts. We keep up a gentle heat in it, the thermometer registering on an average fifty-eight degrees. As soon as it gets up to sixty degrees, we smother and have to open wide the door. I say door, for there is no window. For lighting purposes, we have an old petroleum lamp which is kind enough not to smoke. When we want to peer into the obscure corners of our room, we use our flashlights. Near the stove are some shelves for our stores, — petroleum, shoe grease, blacking, and brushes. In another place are our eating things, — tea, chocolate, cakes, etc., etc. Our washstand is a roughly planed board, with a pail as pitcher and an old salad dish as washbowl. In addition we have a table, two chairs and a stool, which consists of three pieces of wood nailed to a board. This board is cracked, and the legs are on the point of going each one its own way. That's what I sit on when the major comes to see us, as he does every two days to take tea with us, which we indulge in every afternoon when we get back from our duties. And finally, at the end of the room, are our beds, adorable twin bedsteads, so low that

if we fall out of them during the night, we don't go very far, though they are not right on the ground and so are not damp. The ingenious man who made them provided them with a spring mattress, so that the whole thing is wonderfully fine, even though our sheets are simply straw. My two army blankets and cape serve as covers; my haversack is the pillow and my tent canvas the pillow case. This completes the list of my bed fixings, where I sleep splendidly.

I have written some verses on the major, which he nearly splits with laughter over, when he hears them. He wants me to give him a copy of them. I composed them as I was going the rounds of the trenches. I am going to do the same thing for all the other officers of our battalion.

Warmest love to one and all. May God watch over you. His kindness towards us seems unlimited. For my part, I only say to Him, "Thy will be done"; for He knows so much better than I do what is good for me. And the hope of returning to Him is such a consolation.

January 21.

The snowfall has been followed by a sharp cold so that there is no thawing of the snow. It is fairy-like to see, in the evening, the tops of the tall pines take on a slight golden hue, even under the soft light of the stars; and then one asks how is it, when nature is so peaceful, that men can be warring.

As regards our health, it is excellent, which is only natural when you consider the kind of life we are leading, which for the moment resembles that of a north pole explorer rather than that of the Republican soldiers of the early days of the French Revolution.

January 26.

The other day we found among the ruins of a burnt and abandoned house a stovepipe hat of the style of 1830; and what a state it was in! I put it on and began to mimic a tipsy English workman in his Sunday-go-to-meetings. I don't think I ever made our friends laugh so. The major and Captain Cornier were nearly ill from it. I pretended not to be able to light a cigarette

and used up half a box of matches, belonging to one of our party, speaking partly in French as pronounced by a Britisher. You should have heard how they praised my exhibition. The major said he had not laughed so much since the war broke out. So you see we are not to be pitied, at least for the moment.

January 29.

For the past two days the regiment has been in mourning, for our dear colonel was killed in a pretty severe skirmish in which our battalion did not take part, however. It has made us all sick at heart, and there is no merriment now. He was a leader in every sense of the word and a noble-hearted man to boot. We all had perfect confidence in him. He was prudent and courageous at one and the same time. He fell while leading in a charge two battalions. He need not have been there, but this shows the kind of man he was. He knew that the task set the soldiers was a hard one and that some of them might hang back; so he put himself at their head and thereby set a good example.

February 3.

We have finally got the colonel's body, which was lying some six yards from the German trenches. After several unsuccessful attempts to accomplish this, a soldier wrapped himself in a white sheet, so as not to be too conspicuous on the snow in the moonlight, and though the night was terribly cold, he crawled carefully up to the body, which was held fast to the ground on account of the freezing weather. He then fastened a strong rope to the body. But the frozen snow began to creak, and the Boches, who heard the noise, commenced firing in that direction. Fortunately they could not distinguish, on account of the sheet, the outline of the soldier, so that notwithstanding the fusillade of which he was the center, he was not hit and got back safely to our lines. When the firing stopped, he went back to the body, and this time succeeded in bringing it home with him. But he had taken the precaution to attach a rope also to himself so that he could be pulled back to our trenches in case he was wounded. He was made a corporal on the spot, given the military medal and the war cross with palms.

Later

I am just back from the colonel's funeral. I have rarely been present at a more moving ceremony. The little village church was filled with officers and soldiers in their fighting trim. The hymns were well rendered by a choir composed of troopers, and the solos were given by a tenor of the Lyons opera house. At the cemetery were our regimental flag covered with crape and the cross alongside of it. Never have I been so affected. All differences and diversities of opinion disappeared in the presence of those two emblems, symbolizing the two ideas for which we are fighting, — God and Country. The tenor, in uniform, sang the Requiem and the Dies Iræ. A Christ expiring on the cross spread his arms above the soldiers, who had a revolver at their side, while, in the distance, we could hear the booming of the guns. What a contrast and what grandeur. It was hard to believe that in that coffin slept the beloved chief whom we would have followed anywhere. The major delegated Captain Cornier and me to be present at the burial, "because it

was you two whom he loved best," he said. At the grave, I wept like a child, which did me good. Poor dear colonel. The general who spoke at the tomb did not hide his religious convictions. Among other things, he said: "My dear friend Dayet, we had the same hopes and there is our consolation in our grief. We know that some day we shall meet in the celestial land. May God be near your widow and children."

February 5.

Yesterday afternoon I clambered up the mountain side some 880 yards high, in order to examine the enemy's positions on a five-mile front. You cannot imagine the beauty of the panorama. It was simply wonderful. The Alsace mountains, the valleys, the woods, — all this, still covered with snow and a large part bathed in sunlight, seemed to breathe of peace, while in the midst of this grandiose spectacle we little human ants are firing cannon and rifles, and making fairly bristle with barbed wire these quiet forests. What brutes men are! Horrible Boches! I and my companions were near the frontier, and at our feet was a French

village still occupied by the enemy, where we could see the inhabitants moving about. What strange feelings they must have when they look up at these mountain sides where we are and say: "They are there while we are in Bocheland!"

February 18. From a trench in part held by the enemy and at six and a half yards from him.

My men are absolutely astounding for their high spirits, their willingness and their courage. They are determined, if the enemy attacks, not to let him pass through. The other day, during a twenty-six-hour bombardment, I was convinced that we were going to be attacked; so I said to my men: "I count on you, my friends. The order is to die in your tracks rather than yield a single inch of ground. In case I am killed, don't let there be any panic, no losing of one's head; continue to hold your ground without me just as though I were there. I ask only one thing of you: If I am wounded, and the Boches advance, I would like to have two of you fellows carry me off so that I may not fall into the enemy's

hands.” And here was their reply: “Don’t worry, lieutenant. We will do our duty. Let them come on. We are ready for them.”

February 23.

The brigadier general has been here inspecting our positions and went away perfectly satisfied with what we have done.

To give you an idea of the fine morale of my men, I send you this copy of a poster which they have stuck up in my trench:

GRAND HOTEL OF THE TRENCHES & BOYAU’S
HOTEL

Under the Same Management

Guests are politely requested:

1. Not to lean out of the windows lest it makes their heads swim. (The fact is that our trenches are completely buried in the earth and the embrasures are on a level with the ground.)
2. To have nothing to do with the rival concern across the way, the management not holding itself responsible for any accidents which might result therefrom.
3. To use only the space in front of their own embrasure, so as not to bother those in the next room.

4. Not to use too much gas, though it will not be charged for. (There is not even a single candle burning during the night.)
5. To be as careful as possible on leaving not to put in their pockets any bags of earth.

N.B. The management regrets its inability to accept guests for more than twenty-four consecutive hours. (As the duties in that corner of my trench are very hard, the men are relieved every twenty-four hours.)

It is unnecessary to put out your shoes before the relief, the maid servant not being able to begin work before 8 A.M.

In order to see the menu, which cannot be modified in any respect, guests should address themselves to the kitchen at La Fontenelle.

No extra charge will be made in the price of rooms for guests who do not eat at the hotel.

The management is adamant¹ in the application of the above rules.

That isn't so bad, is it? You see that though the Boches are near, that doesn't check the wit and high spirits of our men.

¹ De fer, iron, in the original, being a pun on the name of one of the officers of the battalion, Second Lieutenant Defert.

I am sure that our neighbors over the way are not so gay.

February 24.

Dear Ones: Thanks to all of you for your good letters and the brave words in them. I was happy to see that, like all true French men and women, you accept the situation as it is, with all its perils, risks and dangers of every kind. You make no mistake when you say that you know I will do my duty. Be tranquil on that score; and it seems to me that if I were a father, I would consider it a great consolation, privilege and honor to be able to say, if I learned of the death of my son, "He died at his post for his country." Of course there are moments when one would like to live, have children, bring them up in the paths of honor, make men of them and to profit, in their education, by all the experience which you yourself have acquired. But nobody is necessary or indispensable in this world.

February 25.

Yesterday I went to see the major who is worried over the situation and rather anxious

about it. In five minutes I got him in good spirits again, when he said: "You did well to come and see me. I'm quite another man now." In the evening I did the same thing for my comrades. I acted out a supposed scene of my appearing before the Boches as a prisoner. I gave them my examination by a German officer, — his questions and my answers. I acted the fool, and my listeners fairly roared with laughter. I begin to think that if I were not here, there would be no fun in the battalion, for I manage to get them all in good spirits. But I assure you that there are moments when it requires all the strength one can have to keep from getting blue myself. But your feeling that the men have confidence in you suffices to make you courageous yourself.

March 2.

While on guard in the trenches last night, I jotted down a parody on "Mignon." The major immediately asked for a copy of it. Here is a part of it:

- What is your name?
- Hector often fills the bill,
- But André also, if you will.

What is your age?

The meadows are green again, but the flowers
are in blight,
And I've come from the Kaiser to join in the fight.

What distant lands hast thou traversed to come
hither? Towards what far-off countries
hast thou turned thy steps?

Knowest thou the plateau of stone and of rock,
The plateau of plum trees and the pomegranates
rosy,

Where Jack Johnsons fall with no gentle shock,
Where the cannon balls buzz like the bees on
the posy,

Where rages unbroken, like a gift from the devil,
A winter eternal 'neath a sky that bodes evil?

Oh! could I but fly
From this terrible front where Bulot¹ exiles me, —
There it be, —
There it be that I'm doomed for to live and to
pine,
And may be to die.

Knowst thou the trench where our soldiers guard
keep,
And the wood of the beeches where, when night
is advancing,

¹ Name of the brigadier general commanding in this region.

The Bavarians lie in wait for us, dug in yards
deep,
And the Dumont excavation where the bombs
come a-dancing,
And flying towards heaven, like birds on the soar,
Come the big minenwerfers which pierce to the
core?
There it be. . .

You see the morale cannot be bad since we
are versifying !¹

¹ The verses in the text follow those of the parody, which
does not always stick very close to the original, which runs
in this way :

Quel est ton nom ?

Ils m'appellent Mignon ;
Je n'ai pas d'autre nom.

Quel âge as-tu ?

Les bois ont reverdi, les fleurs se sont fanées ;
Personne n'a pris soin de compter mes années.

Dis-moi, de quelles plages lointaines
Ton âme a gardé souvenir,
Et si ma main brisait tes chaînes,
Vers quels pays aimés tu voudrais revenir.

Connais-tu le pays où fleurit l'oranger ?
Le pays des fruits d'or et des roses vermeilles,
Où la brise est plus douce et l'oiseau plus léger,
Où dans toute saison butinent les abeilles,
Où rayonne et sourit, comme un bienfait de Dieu,

March 8.

I have a big piece of news to tell you. Don't fall off your chairs! I have asked to be transferred to the regular army. If God permits me to live, I will have, with His grace, almost as fine a work to do in the army, when peace comes, as an educator, if I were to continue as a college professor. It may sound somewhat presumptuous for me to say so, but I seem to be necessary here. When you live in daily contact with our admirable private soldiers and discover their splendid qualities and also their lamentable

Un éternel printemps sous un ciel toujours bleu.
Hélas! Que ne puis-je te suivre
Vers ce rivage heureux d'où le sort m'exila;
C'est là, c'est là que je voudrais vivre,
Aimer, aimer et mourir;
C'est là que je voudrais vivre, c'est là, oui, c'est là!

Connais-tu la maison où l'on m'attend là-bas?
La salle aux lambris d'or, où des hommes de marbre
M'appellent dans la nuit en me tendant les bras?
Et la cour où l'on danse à l'ombre d'un grand arbre?
Et le lac transparent où glissent sur les eaux
Mille bateaux légers pareils à des oiseaux?
Hélas! Que ne puis-je te suivre
Vers ce pays lointain d'où le sort m'exila!
Etc., etc.

Act I, scene 6.

defects, one of the worst of which is thoughtlessness, you are led to wish to try and form some generations of men whom France needs, men who have character, method and foresight. The moral rôle of an officer is greater than that of the professor. I may tell you without appearing to be boasting, that my company has been transformed since I took command of it. There is much better discipline among the men, and they are much neater in appearance. I know my pupils liked me, but I prefer the confidence of my grumbling old soldiers whom I can handle without gloves, but who believe in me. When I say to them: "Now, my boys, we've got to strike a blow," or, "My good fellows, I am counting on you," and they reply: "Lieutenant, don't worry; we will do our duty," — I experience a moral satisfaction which I can't describe.¹

¹ It was nearly a year later that Lieutenant Cornet-Auquier got his commission in the regular army. It was just before he was killed, and this is the way he wrote about it: "After the war, I shall try to turn out soldiers of the kind France needs, — men of character, well disciplined, able to exercise self-control and to behave themselves. Those of us who survive this struggle must profit by the mistakes which have been made and the experiences gained."

April 4 and 17.

I am glad to be able to tell you that I have been doing a thing quite worthy of Holy Week. I have saved a soul, or at least prevented a soul from being lost. And oddly enough — irony of the battle field, hazard of a soldier's life — this soul is that of a young girl. The story is a sad one. Her father and mother are dead, the first dying after having ruined the whole family and leaving four children, — a son killed in this war, another who is now slowly dying from a wound, a married daughter who is leading a lively existence while her husband is at the front, and lastly the young woman in question, the youngest of the family, who is barely twenty. She possesses an iron will, is of good morals, struggling against the temptations which surround her, trembling lest she too be ensnared, not knowing where to turn for aid, and pretty withal. She has thus addressed me: "I felt that you were not like the others. Will you counsel me and help me? I have nobody to lean upon. My last brother is dying, and I have

no influence over my sister." I told her that I was quite disposed to advise her, provided that she was decided never to follow in the footsteps of her sister. In the meantime I am asking myself what intuition led this young woman to turn towards me. Did she see by my face that I would not harm her? I can't say how this is, but this I can say that it is both terrible and sublime for a young officer thus to take charge of a soul. Poor little abandoned creature. What a life hers has been. You should see and hear all this near by, — the tears and sobs of this child scarcely twenty, imploring the aid of her dead mother, this phrase ever recurring: "Oh, if mama saw me, if mama were here!" I went with her to the hospital to see her brother who is dying slowly, and to the cemetery where is her mother's tomb, and there before it she swore to me to continue to lead a proper life. But she can't stand her present situation; she wants to change her surroundings and breathe a pure air. "I so long for peace," she said to me. All of us here are very kind to her and treat her with respect. Her

troubles have much moved Major Barberot and Captain Cornier.¹

April 21.

Dear Mama: I should be dominated by but one idea, — love of country. And what is our country, but that which is dear to us, all that we cling to the most ardently. It is papa and those fine little sisters of mine. Those dear spots, which one has loved and where one has suffered, — that is one's country. That poor abandoned little soul which I have just saved by a miracle from the devouring wolf, — she is the country. All those young girls of the Vosges, with their blue eyes, who greet us with a smile when footsore we pass them on the highway — they, too, are the country. What is this word, Country? What is there in this word? Nothing, unless back of it come pressing forward a mass of blessed pictures and loved faces. Men will not die for vague abstractions or for words without sense. We will die for sentiments;

¹ The Reverend Mr. Gambier says of this young woman at a later date: "As soon as she heard of Captain Cornet-Auquier's death, she hastened to his bedside, wept at his feet and placed on his body a modest bouquet as evidence of her gratitude."

we will die for love, affection, tenderness. So I let my heart seek where it can grand energy and pure heroism. It is untrammelled, but strong from the affection which it contains.

At nine o'clock this morning, I saw "our Joffre." We were all moved. A fine looking man with a most benevolent expression of the face. To see him bearing such responsibilities with such serenity and confidence, smiling and calm, increases tenfold your own strength, hope and confidence.

Now, mother, dearest to me among all these admirable French mothers, I would like to see thee the most French of them all. Say to thyself that no life whatsoever, not even that of thine own son, is anything in comparison with the salvation of the country.

May 4 and 8.

The evening we heard of the loss of the *Léon Gambetta*, the Boches on our front sang peons of joy.¹

¹ This French armored cruiser was torpedoed on April 27, 1915, in the Otranto Straits, with the loss of six hundred officers and men.

One must be blind not to see that Germany was preparing for an act of aggression. The fact is she began this aggression as far back as the battle of Jena in 1806. The war of 1870 was simply a first effort in that direction. Since then the German dream has been to build up a vast German Empire of Central Europe and to set up a Hohenzollern on the throne of Charlemagne.

May 15.

Last night eight poilus of my company held in check from eighty to one hundred Boches, who, armed with bombs, grenades, rifles, revolvers and hatchets, tried to take by surprise one of our advanced posts. After a fight which lasted a half hour, the enemy, frightened by the noise we made and blinded by the light of my projector, retreated. One of my men, though wounded in the hand and thigh, went on throwing grenades until he fainted away. The commander of the post, a sergeant, showed astonishing sangfroid and he too, kept throwing grenades midst a shower of bullets. Major Barberot sent this message to the companies of his battalion: "Hurrah for the first company!"

May 23.

My very dear little mama: I received to-day thy three letters and the roses, the roses of Châlon, which arrived with their leaves fallen, except the two white ones which came fresh with thy kisses. I gathered together the perfumed petals of the red roses, and I put them in a bowl of water, whence they send forth their delicious odor. I am happy for thee, dear mama, that Marguerite is with thee for a few days. It is a great source of comfort for me to know it, for I feel that now thou art surrounded with tender and intelligent care. This tranquilizes me.

The weather is now ideally beautiful and warm. I think I have already written you that I have installed a swimming pool near where we are stationed. By a little skilful canalization, we have utilized the water of a near-by brook and when the water gets warmed a little by the sun, the soldiers can take baths. This innovation is of course a great source of amusement. But it was not simply something new, it was also water, and water amuses big boys, even when they

chance to be second lieutenants or even lieutenants commanding a company. We have also found a nice little fire-engine which we of course use to sprinkle one another with and which does not detract from the fun.

We are eating very well just now and are enchanted with our cook, who is still that admirable cyclist, Mornieux. We play all sorts of jokes on this good chap and notwithstanding all our teasing, he never gets angry.

On this beautiful Pentecostal Sunday, I ask God to bestow on you all, on all those whom I love, His most precious benediction.

May 25.

Yesterday at five o'clock, in order to celebrate the entry of Italy¹ into the coalition we gave the Boches a good dose of artillery, and they must have thought that we had suddenly gone mad; for at the same time trumpets and drums sounded as if for the charge, and the regimental band played the "Marseillaise" in my trenches. One of my officers said that while the hymn was

¹ Italy declared war on Austria on May 23, 1915.

being played, I was very pale. I was in fact deeply moved.

May 30.

Last evening I called on Major Barberot, and I greatly enjoyed the walk in the moonlight. The temperature was ideal, and the night birds sounded from time to time their strange cries, while you heard intermittently the shooting and the rumble of the cannon in distant Alsace. At sunrise the mist hung over the low lands, letting the light sift through. There is nothing more beautiful than the fresh sprouts of light green contrasting the darker green of the pines, giving to the whole a velvety appearance.

The other day I found in an abandoned house on the firing line, two pretty kittens whose mother had been killed. They were thin and could scarcely walk. I adopted the poor little orphans, fed them with milk and now they are perfect pictures of health and beauty. I brought them here in my haversack, and one of them made his entry into this village at the head of the company on the shoulders of one of my troopers.

Major Barberot has proposed me for a

divisional citation for my services during the past eight months as a company commander. I was greatly taken aback at this announcement, told him I had not done anything remarkable and so felt that I did not deserve this honor. But he said that "when a company shows the moral value and the bravery that ours does, it is due to the commander, and consequently, . . . but anyway, this is my affair." So I didn't say anything further. So you are going to see me with the war cross!

May 31.

My beloved ones: Your son is a captain! The announcement of this honor will, I am sure, produce a moral and a sentimental joy in the home circle, especially in the case of dear little mama and papa. I know it will bring tears to your eyes when the telegram reaches you. And for me it will mean I must ever render myself worthy of this title, which signifies, as you know, "he who is at the head."

June 4.

Dear ones: One important bit of news follows the other. We are about to leave

this region, where we have been fighting for the past six months, and are going to a spot which, in fact, we are not unacquainted with. In a word, in two hours, we shall start for Alsace. I hope you will accept this news in a submissive spirit and face, with the calm of old warriors, the perspective of the new perils which will be mine, ever with a thorough confidence in God, who can protect me there as He has protected me here. If I am destined to pay my debt to my country by my death, He will have permitted it and so it will be well. I wish to feel that, Christian-like, you are ready for whatever may happen. I regret leaving this Saint-Dié region, where I have passed such memorable hours. You get attached to a place even though you may have suffered much there. Poor Marguerite, who was counting on coming and seeing me here next Sunday, will be much disappointed. But perhaps we may meet in Alsace. Who can tell? That would be finer still.

Tender kisses for you all. May God bless you. He is all-powerful and nothing happens without His willing it. So may it be.

Your grand captain,
André.

*June 2.*¹

I shall probably never know your husband nor your children. All that I ask is that some day you will take them on your knees, and, showing them the portrait of their uncle, as a captain, will tell them that he died for your country and in part for theirs too.²

June 5.

Yesterday I received your nice letters where you tell me of your joy at my promotion. I felt sure that the scene would be about as you described it. I knew that papa would experience one of the greatest joys that one can have under present circumstances. I admit that it made me happy, especially to know that it made you so too.

June 6.

Early this morning I began coughing a little for a minute or two, whereupon my good old cook, hearing me and thinking I

¹ To his younger sister, married and in England at this time.

² His father writes me: "From the very beginning of the war until his own end, he had a presentiment that he would be killed. He confided this belief more than once to his elder sister and to his intimate friends."

had taken cold, got up, went and made some coffee, and bringing it to me said: "Captain, if you have caught cold, you must take something warm."

Heartiest and tenderest love for you all, and may God, who makes His presence felt everywhere, watch over you.

Your big boy.

June 11.

We are about forty-five to fifty-five yards from the enemy's lines, and the moment is approaching when we shall go "over the top" on a bayonet charge. When that moment comes, I trust you will be as calm and confident as myself will be. Let us put all our trust, with perfect serenity, in God. When I charge at the head of my men, I could not find a greater support and addition to my strength than if I could feel, if I could be perfectly sure, that I had got you in that state of mind alone worthy of Christians and French men and women. To know that you are ready to accept joyously every sacrifice would be for me the surest way of having me perform my whole duty as a leader. God has so wonderfully protected me up to the present moment that

we must have confidence that He will continue to do so now under circumstances infinitely more difficult and in the midst of dangers a thousand times greater. What gratitude I owe Him for having thus led me up to the present day, when so many others have already fallen, and how I would like to be more worthy of so many kindnesses. If it is His will, without which nothing can happen to me, that I fall on the battle field, do not cease to hallow His name, for His laboring for our good. And then do not be of those without hope. If it is not for here below, it is for there above and forever. I do not want the strong affection, which unites us to each other in the family tie, to be a source of feebleness and emasculation to me. I wish, on the contrary, that it be an armor which makes me still stronger in the face of danger. I have always wished to be brave; you must aid me therein. You were rejoiced at my promotion, and I rejoiced especially on your account. This honor done me carries with it duties which I desire to perform with a strong will. I pray God to support me in this effort. Do you do likewise. In the meantime I send you all

my filial and fraternal love, tenderest kisses, and commend you to the Heavenly Father.

André.

June 14.

I learn with pleasure that you accept, with true Christian and French stoicism, the eventualities which may lie before me. This is a great consolation to me, and I thank you for having given it to me before the hour comes for the approaching attack, when we should, and I feel that we shall, win. Everything has been admirably well prepared, and this time we are, numerically, as strong as the Germans. And now farewell. May God guard and bless you, and may you be strong in His strength.

June 15. An hour before the charge.

The cannon are raging and the battle is commencing. Forward to victory! May God watch over you and lead you with His benedictions.

June 15. The day after the battle of Metzeral.¹

My dear ones: It was a grand success for our battalion. The charge was full of emotion. We took nearly three hundred

¹ Metzeral is a small town in Alsace.

prisoners and much war material. Our losses were light but some of them very sad. The major escaped unscathed. My company led the attack, and in less than a quarter of an hour, we had captured three lines of the enemy's trenches. When I saw that we had carried the day, I had a nervous fit of crying and exclaimed aloud: "Mama! mama! Hurrah for France!" and finding nobody else to embrace, threw my arms around the neck of my good little sergeant and kissed him as though he were a dear old friend. We were all covered with dirt, dust and powder, but it was glorious dirt; and though I am still too dirty to be touched even by one's finger-tips, and unshaven for ten days, I embrace you on your very lips. I took a lot of booty and a Boche lieutenant surrendered to me. Our colonel said to me: "Captain Cornet, I bring you the felicitations and thanks of the commanding general." God protected me in a wonderful manner; praise be unto Him.

June 17 and 18.

All goes well. The victory is complete. Pushed back everywhere, the Boches are

retreating and setting everything on fire as they fall back. The general of our division has just shaken hands with me and felicitated me. And what a sensation a victory is. The conquered terrain, the pursuit of the enemy who is quite ready to surrender, and then the almost childish joy which one feels at having escaped death.

There were two phases in our attack. In the first place, there was a masterly artillery preparation, when for three and a half hours our cannon showered the adversary with more than five thousand shells. Then, during the final shower, while our 75's whistled just grazing our heads, was the epic charge of the whole battalion, which went forward in three successive waves, a charge which, we learned afterwards, brought applause from those who, from points of vantage, witnessed the scene. In order to grasp the whole picture, you must imagine a volcano in a state of eruption, clouds of smoke, a deafening roar, in the midst of which the battalion's trumpeters sound the charge, while above the whole racket, you hear this repeated shout of a thousand men: "Forward! Forward!" as a bright sun

makes the bayonets glitter; and then comes the rush on the enemy, our necks bent stiffly forward and mouths distorted by a savage sort of smile, followed by shouts of joy when you see the foe fleeing before you. On the right and left was some resistance, which grew feebler and feebler, till suddenly two hundred and ninety-six Germans, eight of them officers, surrendered, all seeming glad to do so. Those who could jabber a little French would say: "You, good comrades!"

To-morrow we are to take part in another operation. But please understand that if the day comes when we are slaughtered, it will be because this is indispensable for the safety of the country; and be it known that the country has simply to call and we will respond. Let your confidence in God always continue. Oh, how fine is this Christian disregard for the things of this world!

June 20.

We are leaving for a region still nearer than is this to the Alsace military hospital; so it would not be surprising if I were to see Marguerite to-night or to-morrow. What do you think of that? Our meeting in

reconquered territory would be finer, would it not? than if it took place when we are taking our customary rest back of the firing-line, — if, in fact, it really does occur. I can picture to myself how astonished Marguerite would be if she saw me under such circumstances. Anyway, it is now pretty certain that if I were wounded, I would be taken to her hospital, which possibility brings me a lot of comfort.

June 21.

This morning a very touching ceremony took place. Major Barberot presented me, in the presence of the whole company, the war cross with the palm. He made a little speech to the men and read the text of my army citation, and wound up with these words: "This is why I am happy to pin this war cross on the breast of my friend Captain Cornet-Auquier." His calling me his "friend" pleased me greatly. Then he embraced me on both cheeks and the colonel did the same. So here you have on my capote this bronze medal, a cross in form, the sign of faith and hope, with its pretty dark-green watered ribbon with red stripes.

I felt that you were present at the ceremony. Anyway, let us await with confidence whatever happens, for God watches over us, and that suffices.

We are camping just above the village where is Marguerite. It lies at our feet. I sent her an oral message by Lieutenant Guillemin, whom papa knows. To get here, we have passed through the most beautiful little spots you can imagine, — just the kind of journey for a honeymoon.

The major and I are now seldom separated. The death of our dear friend Captain Cornier has drawn us still closer together. We occupy the same room, lie on the same bundle of straw and share the same piece of cheese and bread.

June 23.

The battle has ended, at least for the moment, and we have made marked progress. The German prisoners admit that they have lost very heavily and appear to be very glad that they have surrendered, though at first very much afraid lest they would be shot. They inform us that their officers tell them that we kill our prisoners,

and that the best thing for them to do is to fight to the bitter end. But we show them that the contrary is true by treating them as kindly as possible. The major and I gave them tobacco and cigarettes. You may hate a nation and its chiefs, but these soldiers, taken individually, have simply obeyed orders. But, on the other hand, the persons who awaken no pity are the German officers, most of whom are so arrogant that you feel like booting them.¹

June 25.

I have seen Marguerite! At the entrance to the village of Krüth was a group of white-capped nurses awaiting us, — it was Marguerite and her colleagues. As soon as she espied me, she rushed towards me with outstretched arms, clapping her hands and looking deadly pale. I immediately sprang from my horse, and you can imagine how we embraced. The battalion arrived a little

¹ Captain Cornet-Auquier's sister, who saw a great deal of these German officers while she was a nurse at the Royal Palace Hospital, at Brussels, has often said, her father tells me, that no words can fittingly describe the arrogance and brutality of these specimens of Prussian militarism and German "Kultur."

later, and the nurses all went back to the center of the village to see the soldiers file by. We were enthusiastically received by the civil and military inhabitants, while the band played: "You will not have Alsace-Lorraine, and in spite of you we shall remain French."¹ When we reached the nurses, they gave us tremendous applause and shouted: "Bravo! Hurrah for the first company!" I thereupon gave them the finest sword salute that perhaps I ever made in all my life.

After the march past I was taken to the hospital where I met the Marchioness of Loys-Chandieu. The ladies did their best to give the major and me an excellent supper made up of all sorts of nice things. There stood those ladies and young girls surrounding us, who, dirty, unwashed, looking like sin, charmed these fresh, youthful, clean women, perfumed with soap and disinfectants, because we were genuine warriors smelling of the trenches, mud, smoke and powder. They were delighted and evidently glad to see us close at hand, to learn from

¹ "Vous n'aurez pas l'Alsace et la Lorraine, et malgré vous nous resterons Français." A popular French song since 1871.

our own lips the history of our exploits, to listen to us tell of the attack, of the bayonet charge and of the bursting shells. We were the first soldiers they had met right from the front who had seen real fighting and who breathed of the battle. They just enjoyed it. The major was in fine trim and told his stories with a verve that was new even to me and which called forth bursts of laughter so fresh and gay that the whole thing was simply delicious. And there in the midst of it all standing near me, was Marguerite, happy but grave, smiling but still deeply moved, with that saintly air about her and her big eyes. I stayed with her until eleven, when I retired for the night.

The regiment started the next morning at 4.30. Marguerite was up at four, but as I was on the point of starting in an ordinary automobile, the major invited me to get into his first-class car, saying that we could start later and overtake the column. So we didn't leave until after six. This enabled Marguerite to see the whole company, to even drink the coffee of my troopers and to be presented to our officers. You could see that it greatly pleased her to share

our life a little. The colonel, the major and the head doctor of our regiment all showed her marked attention. When we parted there were some tears, but we were both very brave. And this is the end of my story. What a pleasure it was to pass these few hours together and at the very front.

June 26.

The Boches will soon regret having attacked our positions during our absence; we will doubtless soon begin an offensive.¹ In this connection, I need not repeat what I then wrote you when on the eve of entering battle, for I know that you are ready and confident, determined, resolute, firm in the face of danger. I feel that if I must give up my life in this war, your greatest consolation should be found in the fact that I died for the country at my post of duty.

Major Barberot, called to the command of the 5th regiment of Chasseurs, said good-by yesterday to his battalion, and as usual he found the right word for the occasion. All of the soldiers were in tears. You can have no idea how he was applauded. When the

¹ See the letter of July 13 and 15, on page 76.

battalion had got off some distance on the road, and he, with bowed head, was on the way back to his quarters, he was seen to turn round, bring his hand to his cap and salute for the last time his disappearing soldier boys. Poor first battalion. Its excellence is the cause of its losing him. I am much depressed by his departure. But in memory of him I must fight against this depression, for the good of the men, for those who are counting on us and for the country.

We are starting for the trenches.

June 30.

Thanks for all your letters. I expected them to be just as they are, — vibrating with emotion and pride. You know that all that concerns me I immediately report to you and, if you can, by my letters, get a correct idea of scenes like the attack on hill Number 830, at Metzeral, or of the ceremony attending the conferring on me of the war cross, how much easier it is for me, knowing so well all your surroundings, to picture to myself the little family group at the arrival of this or that piece of news from me. I know that your eyes must grow moist now and then,

for when I read your letters, I too am moved, and often I am obliged to cough before speaking, so as to strengthen my voice if I have to give an order.

Your letters do me good. There are days when one needs affection, all the affection of those who are dear to you, in order to remain strong in the presence of some blows which fall upon us here. To know that you are so happy because I have done my duty, my humble duty as an officer and leader, gives me strength for the future trials. Your confidence, your courage, do me good and prepare me for the struggles to come. You ought to be cited in the presence of the first company as "knowing how to communicate to their son the energy and calm which fill their own breast."

July 2. My Birthday.

Deep thanks to you all for your affectionate thoughts of me to-day. I know that these thoughts are constant, and I assure you also that they are especially tender on July 2nd, when I am sure your prayers were also most fervent.

Yes, it is wonderful how God has protected

me, and papa may well ask, Why? For I am no better than others, less probably, or at least the same, as many who have fallen. Why has He kept me from harm? Papa asks, What are God's designs in reference to me? But I do not even ask this question, much less try to answer it. I simply go on living from day to day; for the morrow, for the day that begins, for each hour. I am content to say to Him: "Thy will be done"; and I find this infinitely good and comforting. I testify to His infinite goodness and think only how I may humiliate myself for having so little merited it, while I try, every day, to make myself more worthy, by asking myself what Jesus would have done in my place.

But do not praise me too warmly. I do not at all merit it. I am no hero. I have simply tried on every occasion to do my duty. I am only an officer who strives to set a good example. That is all, all, all.

July 6 and 7.

Something serious is being prepared for, — the hour of an offensive is approaching. But we must face it with calm and confidence. I count on your doing so. Place your fate

and mine in the hands of God. As for myself, I do not ask Him to spare me. I am in His hands and at the disposal of the country. I ask of Him only His strength for the struggle and His forgiveness of my sins. I press you all to my heart which is full of you. I have but one comment to make, — if I were a father and my son were killed, I could not find a greater consolation than to be able to say to myself: “He gave his life for the country; I have not lost him; I have given him to the country.” I may add, that, after what has happened recently, I have seen at least the dawn of victory, and I thank God for having permitted me this. If I have to give my life for the final victory, I would find, in dying, this consolation, — I had helped to push across the frontier this German horde which has already too long stained the fair soil of France. May the Heavenly Father be near you and be your strength.

Your son and brother,
André.

*July 9. Telegram.*¹

Safe and sound. Success. Affection.

¹ The day after the victory at La Fontenelle, as described in the letter of July 13 and 15 in the text.

July 13. Telegram.

Am well. Given the Legion of Honor by General Joffre. Affection.

July 13 and 15.

Dear Ones: I have so many things to tell you that I do not know where to begin, and I have lived through such horrible days that I hesitate to go back to them and stir up the memory of them, for each time that I speak of them, sad sensations are awakened, the pictures of bloody spectacles reappear in clearer outline, the nightmare is reborn in all its abomination; it is as though I found myself suddenly transported back into the midst of those scenes of desolation and death.

Yes, it is a brilliant victory, that cannot be denied; but how dearly paid. You must have guessed it, for in the note which I wrote you in haste, I said that I commanded the battalion, which told the tale of what had become of the other officers. An unheard-of thing, miraculous, a divine benediction, — not one of my officers, those of the first company, received even a scratch! What is there about this company that makes

such things possible? What guardian angel protects it with his wings? And yet to it fell the most dangerous part, for it was taken on the flank by the machine-gun fire of the enemy, our artillery being unable to reach that point.

We started off in a perfect rain of shells. What a shower of bullets, what a hell! While I was engaged in sending forward the sections one after the other, and was on the point of rushing forward with my supporting officers, an immense shell struck where I was standing, blinded me with earth and buried a man at my side. Then it became a race under shell fire and through smoke, a wild race among the bullets, followed by victory, a complete victory, the Boches surrendering in bunches of twenty, thirty, fifty, one hundred, stupefied, imploring with their hands joined and their arms raised to heaven, and crying: "Gut Kamerad! Gut Kamerad!" I never saw anything so vile, so base, so boot-licking as the German who surrenders, whimpering, bending in submission. They're a bad lot. The officers, arrogant, even in defeat; their men, as low down as they make them. By evening, we had taken six

hundred prisoners. The same thing went on during the night and the next day. During the night, we also organized the conquered terrain. The next day too the enemy's artillery commenced to fire on us in a spirit of revenge, a state of mind very dear to the Teuton. But their cannon were badly aimed, and it was evident the adversary did not know exactly where we were. Yet our headquarters, common to me and the commander of the battalion, is pretty well besieged but by shells of such a small caliber that they only make us smile. However, a day later, that is on July 10th, the dance began again. At four A.M. a German flying machine discovered just where we were, and soon they began shooting at us, the shells getting nearer and nearer, until the circle of iron and death closed in tightly around us. At eight o'clock the inevitable happened, — the fatal shell struck us like a waterspout. It was a big "130" and burst at a yard and a half from where we were, killing, wounding and destroying everything and everybody, almost. The death-rattle of the dying and the shrieks of the wounded, in the midst of clouds of smoke and dirt, —

it was simply horrible. We had five killed, among whom was the commander of the battalion, five wounded and four untouched, I being one of these last. A telephonist was killed so close to me that my cap, which had been knocked off, was filled with the poor fellow's blood. Two of my subordinate officers were killed, but my cyclist was unhurt. As the shells kept on coming, we took advantage of the cloud which enveloped and hid us to stealthily decamp, one after the other, from this veritable hell. Our faces and hair were full of earth and blackened, our temples were running with perspiration, — in fact, we no longer looked like human beings. What a day! And it means furthermore the battalion without a head, a very heavy inheritance for me to assume.

But God came to my aid and blessed me, and everything passed off all right as far as I was concerned. I dare not reflect on the mystery which surrounds His wish that I be not killed like the others. The wherefore of this obsesses me, and I am almost terrified by the evidence of such divine goodness. It fairly crushes me. What is He

going to demand of me? Why did He not wish it to be my hour which struck, as it was the hour of my chief? To what task does He intend to call me? Or, — well, I cannot solve the mystery. I can only praise Him, bless Him, throw myself at His feet and thank Him for having spared me, for I feel so little worthy of so many evidences of loving kindness. I tremble, and there are days when it seems to me that the divine goodness is more impressive than His anger. Who am I, my God, to be made the recipient of such great bounty? The attempt to solve these problems agitates me, and in the midst of these deep reflections, I must think of the battalion, of the men who now count on me.

When a crisis comes, soldiers turn to their chief and try to find out how he looks at things. Nothing in my acts or appearance must betray any inquietude or nervousness. On the contrary, I must inspire confidence by my serenity. After the recent shock, I had a nervous crying spell. But it was witnessed only by a fellow officer; none of the men saw it. To them I said: "My boys, we must think of the country." Two days later I learned that Joffre in person was going

to decorate me with the cross of the Legion of Honor. In fact, the ceremony took place the next morning, the 13th. The regimental flag also received from the hands of the great chief the war cross, the regiment itself being mentioned in most flattering terms in army orders. And this is what Joffre says of the regiment: "With the troops of the 20th corps, they are the best I have seen." Joffre asked me how old I was, and I answered, "Twenty-eight, General." Then he continued: "Why, how young you are. The winning of this cross ought to give you much pleasure, and I am very happy to be able to bestow it upon you." Then he kissed me on both cheeks, — real smacks; and I in turn embraced him. I trembled and was very much moved. In the afternoon, I had an interview of more than an hour and a half with the general of our division and his staff officers, all very charming men. The general was especially amiable, had me sit down beside him and discussed things with me. I amused them very much by my way of telling certain things. In the evening I dined with the brigadier general.

I miss very much Major Barberot; I feel

so alone after these recent shocks from the emotion of which I have not yet recovered. It all weighs heavily on my heart. But God is there!

July 17.

Yesterday I presided at a very moving ceremony. I represented the colonel at the burial of one of our fellow officers, — a very fine young second lieutenant killed at the head of his company. Informed at the last moment, I improvised a little speech which ended with these words: "May the regrets which Lieutenant Maurice Réjol leaves behind him and the tears which we shed be some consolation to his widowed mother. But it is towards God that she should now turn her eyes to find comfort in the hope of an eternal meeting in that native land on high, where there will nevermore be war or the shedding of blood."

July 21.

I have met André Paulus.¹ I was riding on horseback through a village, when a young

¹ Another young man of the intellectual élite and of a high moral standard killed as a second lieutenant at Linge in October, 1915.

student-officer of artillery, seated in front of a house, got up and came towards me. I immediately recognized him. You can tell his parents that he is the perfect picture of health. He has just got on the honor roll at college. It was pleasant for us two Chaloneons thus to meet in a little Vosges village.

July 30.

I have read your good letters of the 26th and 27th. I am happy to learn that you are resting at Fontaines, in a sunny house, with a garden, trees, a sward and water, — after Châlon. Dear old Châlon. There are hours when I would give much to be there, so that for a time, at least, I would not hear the cannon or be worried about an attack or a counter-attack. And yet I am certain that one would soon long to be back at the trenches. You would feel that because you were not there, things could not be going on all right.

At this moment, we are a little back of the front, as first reserve, where I feel much more nervous than at the front itself. Yesterday I was on my horse on my way

over to see the colonel, when the division general came up. He was going to the trenches, and will you believe it? I asked permission to accompany him. I went into the trenches with him, in order to see and study the situation and to explain to him what I knew about it all. The truth is that this military life has taken full possession of me.

August 7.

It is possible that I soon may be able to go and make you a visit. But I shall do so on certain conditions. 1. Before I arrive, no cake shall be made that cannot keep; that when I announce my departure, you will await patiently my arrival and will not go twelve times a day to the station to come back each time with a still longer face. 2. During my stay, I shall not be required to go out and make visits but one day out of every three, and that I shall not be asked to give my opinion as to when the war will end, what I think of the Russian retreat, or the taking of Warsaw. 3. After my departure, you will be reasonable and confident. Do you agree to these conditions? If so,

I shall go with the greatest delight to see and embrace you.¹

August 23.

The morale is good here at the front and I hope the same is true of the civilians at home. You know how happy I was to be with you all again. I really preferred being at Fontaines where it was more restful. And then home is where the dear ones are. May God bless you and keep you in physical and moral health. May He transmit to you His own strength which springs from an entire and absolute confidence in His goodness.

August 29.

Yesterday morning the battalion went on a march with its regimental flag at the head of the column. When we reached Saint-Dié, we paraded through all the principal streets, our band playing and a large concourse of people applauding. The people

¹ This visit lasted from August 10 to August 20. His father writes: "He was in splendid health and full of life, gaiety and in the highest spirits. As the train was about to start back, he said to us: 'If I should be killed, it is for France that I shall fall; so God bless France!'"

were much stirred, for it was the anniversary of the entrance of the Germans into the place, and it was not forgotten that we it was who delivered the city. Flowers were thrown to the soldiers, and at one point a lady advanced towards my horse and handed me an immense bouquet, tied with a tri-colored ribbon, when, with my sword in one hand and the flowers in the other, I was so moved that I could only just manage to say, "Thank you, Madam."

In the afternoon, an officer and I went to Plainfaing in order to place two wreaths on the tomb of poor dear Major Barberot. His grave is very modest, — a mound, a wooden cross, a wreath from the regiment of Chasseurs and some little faded wild flowers. To think that this man who was so superiorly intelligent and cultivated, so full of life and so overflowing with activity, should be lying there under a few feet of earth. I cannot believe it. I shall never get over his loss.¹

¹ Major Barberot was killed at Linge, August 4, 1915. M. Cornet-Auquier says of him: "He was an officer of exceptional parts, remarkable not only as a tactician, but for his courage and his influence over his men. To him was largely due the Metzeral victory, where, on the very battle

Feeling the need of relaxation, I went later for a horseback ride alone in the woods in a heavy rain. I went up to a height of some 760 yards or more. The grand mysterious woods, full of mist and silence, moved me to the depths of my soul. Even the hard rain beating into my face had something delicious about it.

September 4.

It has occurred to me that you could find at Châlon, among our friends and acquaintances, some ladies who would form a committee of "Godmothers" for my company, which committee would be kind enough to send me this coming winter all sorts of things that would be useful to my troopers. In our mountains, the cold will soon be on us. I would like to see the committee made up of all parties and religions, — Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mahometans, no matter which provided my poilus are warm. It might be called the Society of the God-

field, General Maud'huy took from his own breast his own war cross and attached it to the capote of Major Barberot. After his death, his command was named by its officers 'the Barberot Battalion.'"

mothers of the Lions.¹ Let the good work begin. God bless France and may you all be of good courage.

September 19.

To-morrow will be a year since, in a fearful rainstorm and a tremendous shower of shells, Major Barberot made me the commander of the first company. A whole year! What things have happened since then, what events of every sort, how many dear friends have disappeared never to return, while I am still here. Why? It is one of God's mysteries. The gratitude one feels seems so small in comparison with the favor shown; you know you are so unworthy of this kindness that you are almost terrified at its grandeur and its frequency.

September 24.

With two officers and twelve volunteer poilus I have just made a night reconnois-

¹ After their brave conduct at Metzeral and La Fontenelle, General de Maud'huy called these soldiers "The Lions of the 133rd," and the name has clung to the regiment ever since. The proposed committee was founded and still continues to care for the first company of the regiment.

sance near the German lines at a corner of the front which has long puzzled me. Protected by my patrol, I alone pushed my way, crawling among the underbrush and the tall grass right up near to the trenches. In the stillness of the night, you could hear the Germans at work with their pick-axes and could distinguish the blows of their mallets driving in the stakes for the barbed wire entanglements. It made you feel very creepy. I succeeded in making a really useful reconnoissance, and the terrain now appears to me very different from what it did before. Among other things, we found that the enemy had set up in this wood a telephonic post. We cut the wire and tore it away for a distance of over two hundred yards. I have a perfect passion for this sort of reconnoissance, to which, I may add, very little danger is attached, while there is a real fascination about it.

October 3 and 10.

Don't worry about the Balkans. Let them go on as they are going, but you have confidence in the final result. If papa would let me have his pulpit some Sunday at

Châlon, I would revive the morale of any weak-kneed members of the congregation.

Poor Paulus¹ I am going to write his family this very day.

October 17.

I have a new sweetheart. Her name is Lucie, a pretty little blond, four and a half years old. All she talks about is marrying "Cornet." She always cuts the name right short. And yet I had a rival, — a handsome young artillery lieutenant to whom she said she was already "engaged", and who had given her an aluminum ring. For an hour she hesitated which of us to take, as she "wanted us both." But notwithstanding all the seductive efforts of my rival, she finally said to him: "Well, I'm bouncing you for Cornet." Whereupon he replied: "But you know the engagement ring is always given back when the engagement is broken." Immediately she stuck out to him her chubby little finger that he might take off the ring. A pretty little episode, is it not? But perhaps the funniest thing about it is that this "marriage" made me

¹ See page 82.

the son-in-law of a woman younger than I am, and the nephew of a young girl of twenty whom I call "my old aunt Madeline." This whole idyl occurred very near the Boches, not a spot exactly suited for such romance.

Warmest love from me who confides you to the care of the Heavenly Father.

October 27.

Yes, that is very nice, the story from Switzerland about the flowers thrown by the French wounded to the German wounded. But I say, enough of this sentimentality! For the moment, we should entertain only feelings of hatred for the assassins of Miss Cavell.¹ When I think that her fate might have been that of Marguerite, it makes me simply furious. Nice little acts of this kind should be adjourned for the present. They might perhaps be allowed to pass in neutral countries as "diplomatic measures", but as nothing more. I admit that when you see these Germans, haggard and frightened, come out of their trenches to surrender,

¹ The British nurse in Brussels basely shot by the German military authorities under most tragic circumstances.

you take pity on them and easily become charitable. Under the circumstances I am one of the first to act in this way. But one must fight against this feeling and get this fact well fixed in your head that though these persons have the human form, they are not men that you have before you.

But the neutrals disgust me even more than the Boches. There is no name for the cowardness of those who remain indifferent when they are witnesses of the monstrous crimes committed in this war by these Germans.

November 2. Resting back of the firing-line.

Marguerite is with me! And will have been here since yesterday at ten A.M. until to-morrow afternoon. Isn't that fine? She arrived in a military auto with two chauffeurs! Her coming has created a sensation in the cantonment. Naturally all the officers are charmed to have a young girl at table. She has seen the places where I fought in August, 1914, — the castle of Saulcy-sur-Meurthe, where I came near being taken prisoner, the station where you arrived last December, etc.

November 5.

What a good and agreeable memory Marguerite's visit has left behind her. But of course also regrets, and yet at the same time how deep is my thankfulness that she was able to come.

When you are in immediate contact with war, the man who reflects finds out just what he is worth. You end by perceiving that there is really no other authority than that based on an unquestioned intellectual and moral superiority, on abilities which everybody recognizes. If it is not so, it is the stripes on your sleeve which are saluted and not the man, while the person saluted can easily perceive by the look of the man who salutes him whether he is considered a real chief or simply a person who has a military title. Confidence in yourself alone permits you to speak out and with firmness, and to be listened to even by your superiors; and it is a duty so to speak, for at this moment the only thing to be considered is the saving of the country.

November 24.

Yesterday I represented the colonel at the burial of one of our young fellow

officers, killed by a bullet that struck him full in the head. At the cemetery, the commander of his company said a few words, as did also the general of our division, who referred to "Major Barberot, whom we all still mourn." These deaths in the trenches have a peculiar sadness about them; they seem to happen more in cold blood. To be killed during an assault, intoxicated by the thunder of the cannon, the sounding of the trumpets, the wild charge, the whirlwind which accompanies victory, — this is a magnificent way of ending one's military career. But to fall from a commonplace ball while making a humdrum inspection in the trenches, — what more inglorious end than this?

November 25.

We have started in again on our turbulent snowball battles. Supported by my cook Martin and one of my men, I have held my own against a number of my non-commissioned officers. You can imagine how it amuses them to fill their captain's face with snow.

December 11.

There are days when I envy my dog. No cares, good things to eat, a comfortable bed, dozing and snoring quite at his ease, — such is the proverbial “dog’s life.” I would like, for a few weeks, not even to think. It seems to me it would be so restful. It is cerebral and nervous fatigue which kills us. Physical fatigue is agreeable and healthful, and you go into training to produce it. But there is no “going into training” in the case of mental fatigue. Marching every day, sleeping in your clothes on straw, — that’s nothing. Rain, snow, cold, wind, — that’s nothing, either. You can get used to all these, and they generally do you no harm; on the contrary, they are pretty sure to do you much good. But what concerns the head is quite another story. There are days when I think I am getting weak-minded. And then, in addition, there is nothing, nothing, nothing for the heart.

December 13.

The Frenchman has an enormous stock of good qualities, — such as courage, hero-

ism and even — but who would have thought it? tenacity. But he is by nature careless and undisciplined. For instance, it is no easy matter to get my men to observe the rules of the most elementary hygiene. The Frenchman is also admirable in that he redeems his defects by wonderful good qualities when a crisis happens. But he would do much better to avoid the crisis by being more far-sighted and prepared. We are tenacious to-day, but the Boches have been so for the past fifty years. We are wonderful in improvising; but there are domains where improvising doesn't work. War is one of these. Because we didn't like war, which was all very well, we thought there wouldn't be any, which was not so well; and not believing there would be any, we were not prepared for it, which was almost criminal.

December 22.

If I had a chance to address a Christian audience, or one calling itself such, this is about what I would say:

You believe in, or profess to believe in, God, in a God who is a Father. You have

faith in His justice, in His great kindness. You hold that nothing happens without His willing it, and this will is essentially holy, good and wise. Such being the case, you should have confidence in God and await with patience whatever comes to pass. Say to yourself that Justice will triumph, and that Right will finally vanquish brute force, because God has so willed it, because He so wishes it and because He will always continue to so wish it. The cause of Justice and Right is His cause and is ours. It is to us, the allied armies, that He has confided the task of making this cause triumph. It is we therefore who will be victorious in this struggle. When? How? I cannot say, and after all it matters little when and how. The final result is what counts. Don't fear therefore, but believe. Stop being anxious and nervous; check all recrimination; cease every criticism. Don't say: "If I were only Joffre or the Prime Minister!" You are not, thank God, either Joffre or Briand. If you tremble, it is because you do not believe in the final victory of Justice and Right, in the triumph of the cause of God on earth. Be logical then and say

that God is not God and that for the past twenty centuries the world has deceived itself in believing in the law of love proclaimed by Jesus, for, like Him, it is for love that the splendid soldiers of France die, and those of England, Belgium, Servia and Russia, too.

December 24.

While I am writing you, our heavy artillery is thundering, and it will doubtless be the same to-morrow. This is not the kind of music one would choose for Christmas, and yet I esteem that, in spite of all, it is a song of peace which comes out of our cannon's mouth. They sing of the approaching deliverance, the new era for which we labor, for we, too, we are the workmen of peace and good will on earth. But unfortunately the Boches have put back the cause of humanity several thousand years. Peace will come, however, though its birth may be painful.

Lucie writes me that she hopes the moon *and the sun* will shine for Christmas eve. She is a new Joshua, as she makes the sun stand still for the poilus and wishes that

the big pine woods be as light as at mid-day, doubtless so that my "lions" may find more easily the way to their mouth for the dainties of Christmas which have been sent them.

With God and in thought we are near one another.

December 29.

Dear Ones: I wish you a bright and happy new year. What irony seems in this old greeting so bitterly trite to-day. Bright, when humanity is engaged in tearing itself to pieces midst awful internecine suffering. Happy, when there can be no perfect joy on so much of this poor earth. And yet this year 1916 can be bright and happy, if it be rich in heroic and generous acts; it can be bright and happy if from all evil springs good, if this country, now undergoing suffering and trial, is worthy of itself. It can be happy if victory perches on our banners and brings with it a noble peace.

May God ever abide with you and grant you that tranquillity of mind which is based on joyous submission to His will. May He minister unto you the moral strength

which may enable you to support, as good Christians and French men and women should, whatever spiritual trials He may be pleased to thrust upon you, and the physical strength to endure the more material privations which may be yours. But especially and above all else, may He instill into you perfect confidence in His wisdom and kindness, confidence whence should be born, if this confidence is genuine, interior peace of mind and domestic tranquillity.

Best remembrances to my friends. Tell them to have confidence, not to fear, but to believe, believe, believe.

December 31.

Dear ones: The last day of the year. To-morrow will be 1916. With what giddy rapidity have passed the twelve months which are just ending. But it is not astonishing that the time seems so short, when every moment is taken up, when events are so crowded into those little compartments which we call days and hours that it seems impossible they can be held in such a limited space. What a strenuous, well-

filled existence we are leading. We will have run the whole gamut of sweet and tragic emotions, the joyous and the sad. What a strain on men's nerves, and how well tempered must be those who withstand it. Poor human nerves, poor little fragile things. For it is especially by our nerves that we get through this artificial and abnormal course which we are now pursuing. And what wear and tear there is when one reflects a moment about it. What can we expect of the young generation who have gone through all this? How worn out they'll be and how early they'll grow old. And yet, in the midst of this earthly hell, what divine benedictions there are. You stand abashed, so unworthy of these benefits do you feel yourself to be. To have had death pass by and graze you with his black wings, to have seen the Grand Mower strew around you over a bloody soil your chiefs and your own soldiers, almost your children, to have heard the death rattle, and the hoarse moaning of those about to die, to have had a man killed in your arms and been bespattered by his warm young blood, to have felt weighing on your shoulders

at twenty-eight the responsibility of holding, with a diminished and weakened battalion, a position snatched from the enemy at the price of what sacrifices, and then, freed for a few hours from this tempest, to have felt what glory is, to have received from the hands of the Grand Chief the blood-red ribbon, to have been embraced by him, to have been fêted, made much of, to have seen the old men of these sad regions shake your hands, moved, and to have been smiled upon by the women who exclaim, "Thank you," — and all this happening during a few hours, in two or three days. Do you not think that here is enough to break down even the most robust constitution?

There are moments when, living over again in memory these past hours, you feel as though you were crushed and overthrown by all that you have experienced. And when you throw off this nightmare and escape from this atmosphere which smothers you, you still find that you must go on struggling, struggling; never speak of the future, never be able to say, To-morrow. On the threshold of this new year, you seem to have reached a grand highway where the

milestones do not tell the distance still to make; you know how many miles you have come but not how many you have still to go. And yet Forward is the word of command. The way is still long and hard, but victory is at the end. As Joan of Arc has said: "The soldiers will battle and God will give the victory."

Remiremont, January 2, 1916.

Yesterday morning I left the trenches to come here in order to follow some special military lectures. The ride was fine over an excellent mountain road which wound among the pines. But the event of the day was my telephoning to Marguerite. I immediately recognized her voice when she said: "But what are you doing there?" We had a rapid exchange of questions and replies. It is arranged for me to see her on Sunday.

January 5.

The lectures are very interesting. It is impressive to hear the speaker, who is back from Champagne, tell us his experiences, and you really are wrought up when he says

that "we came within an ace of breaking through the line."¹

January 9.

I have spent the day with Marguerite on the Alsatian front and brought her back with me to Remiremont, where she is to spend two days with me.

January 23.

By a happy coincidence, I was present when President Poincaré pinned the war cross on Marguerite's breast. We are both on the point of starting to pass our leave with you at Châlon.

February 3.

Leaving you to-day and arriving at the front, I found awaiting me here my nomination as an officer in the active army.

February 7.

We have overheard some Boche conversations. The morale is very low in their army and the people at home write the

¹ The reference is to the famous French drive in September, 1915.

soldiers at the front most discouraging and depressed letters. It appears that at Nuremberg whole families go to bed early so as to forget their hunger. The Boche soldiers call our 75 "an accursed cannon", and add: "May the Lord God preserve us from it." For victors, this doesn't speak very well for the morale. On the other hand, the morale of our men is excellent, notwithstanding their having been so long on guard in the trenches in the cold, the rain, the snow and the wind, thus assuring your security and the serenity of your sleep and daily existence. Their morale has not weakened an instant all this time. They are simply admirable. To those of us who live along side of them week in and week out, their heroism is our daily bread, and it does not appear to us extraordinary. But if you begin thinking about it a little, you quickly come to the conclusion that each one of these poilus is a sublime hero. I am especially proud of those of my own company, which without being as perfect as I would like to have it, is nevertheless the first, not simply in numerical order, but for quality. My men feel very well that this is so. They know

that the first company is made up of fighters, that it is also a fine company; and they have a real affection for their captain.

February 8.

My thoughts are often with you, and now that Marguerite is on the point of returning to you, I will feel it very keenly when she leaves Thursday morning. This letter will probably reach you the day after her departure. I hope she will find you brave and confident. We at the front so much need to feel that those we have left behind are courageous and sanguine. That helps us to support whatever comes here, and we then feel that we are working for something.

February 11.

The home must be empty indeed now; but it is for France. Follow the advice given in the song "Close up the ranks." Let shoulder touch shoulder. Pool your affections, your individual energies, your personal confidence. Let your family life be more intense and profound than ever, and especially place above love of children, love

of country. Be wholly dominated by a ferocious hatred of the invader. Never let discouragement infiltrate into your hearts. In a word, be French. These must be the conditions existing in the rear if we at the front are to fight with the fierce energy which triumphs over everything. This is the price of victory.

Denipaire, February 28.

Don't be too much impressed by what is happening at Verdun.¹ This German offensive does not worry us a bit. Every mile that the Germans advance costs them twenty-five thousand men. At this price we would be willing to let them have the fortress. The aim of the present war is not to hold a certain number of miles of territory, but the destruction of the largest possible number of the enemy's men. If Verdun were taken, it would of course be a great moral success. But what after that? The present war has demonstrated the little value of fortresses as a means of checking an enemy's advance. Back of Verdun there is one fortified zone after

¹ The celebrated attack on Verdun was just beginning.

another, successive lines of trenches, network after network of barbed wire, etc. After six days of fighting, and immense efforts, the enemy has not attained one half of what we accomplished in Champagne in forty-eight hours, for in two days we captured one hundred and fifty cannon. The Boches will not have the success which they are hoping for.

Denipaire, February 29.

I am enjoying here a period of half repose, as immediate reserve, a mile or two from the trenches. Though I am very busy, this is the most comfortable resting place I have had since I have been at the front. I am staying with some very worthy people, am well lodged, well taken care of, coddled even, in fact treated as a son. And my little "fiancée" ¹ is here, which increases the charm. My days are employed in visiting different sectors of the front in connection with a plan for a counter-attack which the generals of division and brigade have asked me to study. I have been at the work all day to-day and am just back all tired

¹ See page 90.

out. I am going to bed without even eating, so weary am I.¹

¹This was Captain André Cornet-Auquier's last letter. He was mortally wounded during this night, at about four A.M., March 1, by a piece of shell which struck him in the thigh, penetrated his abdomen and tore the intestines. He died in the arms of his father and sister often mentioned in these letters. When he learned that his end was near, he said quietly, "Mama, mama," and turning to his father with a smile, he murmured: "It must be accepted, one must submit." His death occurred on March 2, 1916, and two days later he was buried at Saint-Dié, in the presence of the general of division, the brigadier general, his colonel and a large number of officers and soldiers. The general of division spoke at the grave, his eyes filled with tears, and Colonel Baudrand paid a fine tribute to his favorite officer, pronouncing him "Un soldat sans peur et sans reproche", the title of the French edition of these letters.

L'ENVOI

I cling to the thought that the Dead are not
dead,

If a memory lives on, — if a tear-drop is shed.

If somewhere, sometime, in some heart comes a
thrill

For the face that is gone, — and the voice that
is still.

— EDWARD ROSENZWEIG.



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